

Agitation in Older Persons with Dementia Caused by Sleep Problems or Psychiatric Syndromes

Sleep problems are common in dementia. One type of problem is insomnia—trouble falling asleep at night or waking up throughout the night. Although the cause is often unclear, it is sometimes possible to pinpoint a reason. Physical or medical problems, such as depression, nervousness, or physical pain can cause insomnia.

Sundowning is another type of sleep problem. Sleep patterns are controlled by an internal clock in our brain that senses day and night, telling us when to rest and when to be active. This clock is often damaged in dementia. The person may be awake and overactive at night, thinking it should be daytime and trying to get dressed and out of bed. This type of confusion, disorientation, and agitation is called sundowning because it usually begins in the early evening.

To reduce agitation caused by sleep problems, the following strategies are suggested: Schedule later bedtime; allow for activities or tasks that can safely be done at night, plan more daytime exercise; adjust the temperature in the room; use night lights; reduce or eliminate caffeine; provide nighttime snacks; ensure a clear, well lit pathway to the bathroom; and eliminate or limit naps.

References

www.eonline.net/Knowledge/Articles/agitation.htm